

Finding Eleven (And dealing with the consequences) by lonelyDriversManual

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Summary: Takes place right after season 1. Hopper made a deal with Mike that if he found Eleven, he'd tell Mike. Guess who he found? You guessed it. Eleven.

1. A New Hope

"You're like a little girl!"

They had just finished another campaign in just 10 short hours and Dustin was revelling in the victory with some fun rough-housing. Will had just left, and Mike wasn't the fighting type, so his thoughts wandered to where they *always* did: Eleven. The girl who had seemingly popped out of nowhere and disappeared without a trace. He glanced over towards El's blanket fort. He didn't know why he did this, knowing every time he even thought about her he'd feel emptiness, but he did every day, without fail. He'd gone out looking for a few weeks now, first the 4 of them, searching for hours at a time, then Joyce said it was "Unhealthy" so Will left. Lucas was second to go, trying to keep the past behind him (And thinking she was gone.) And the search party had dissolved 3 days ago when Dustin had started to move on, diverting his attention to the D&D game. Now for the past 2 days it was just Mike, wandering the woods, searching dangerously close to Hawkins Lab for that girl he'd lost.

"Dustin? Lucas?"

They both unravelled in a second, noticing the seriousness in his voice

"Yeah, Mike?"

"I thought I saw Eleven. That night, after It took her."

"Wait, you're saying she's hiding?"

Lucas and Dustin had sat back down by now, intrigued by this new information.

"What I'm saying is the bad men must have scared her off into the woods."

"Or caught her."

Mike and Lucas stared at Dustin.

"She's too powerful to be caught."

Dustin now knew he'd said something wrong.

"Oh, uh.. yeah, totally, soooo we'll go to the chief first thing tomorrow and tell him this... and maybe he can help us find her."

Dustin, playing damage control nodded at them with them nodding back.

"Yeah, OK. She's still out there, right. Let's do it."

Dustin then ran upstairs to tell Will their plan, but he'd already left, they'd have to give the plan to him tomorrow.

Hopper glanced down at his blue bracelet, then to his watch. 6:30. That stupid Christmas party. He had tried blending back into society the last few weeks, but his thoughts seemed to always be on that kid. That girl. He got the call from the lab that she was still alive a few weeks back, spotted near the Wheeler kid's house. He'd gone through her appearance at least 5 times a day. "Girl, 12ish, buzzcut, goes by "Eleven" last seen wearing a pink dress and a checkered flannel. He changed his glance to the TV, staring at the blank screen. He knew she was still out there, he just had to find her. Hop got up and left the couch, but not before bringing along some Tupperware. He'd be laying a trap in the woods tonight.

The party was short, and the time he spent there was even shorter. He made the rounds and picked off some food from the tables into the bowls. Before he knew it, he was flying down an old country road with Christmas songs on. Sara had loved Christmas, but his mind was on the trap right now. He'd have to suppress those feelings for another time. Placing the food into the wooden box was a surprisingly calm thing to do. He poked around the woods for a bit, looking for signs of life. He swore he saw a small shadow of a running figure that night.

"Hop! There's 4 boys here to see you! I'm sending them in!"

Hop thought to himself "Oh no."

"So we were thinking... maybe... we could all look for Eleven later today, with you. Yeah?"

Those boys were something, they'd been searching for her all this time.

"No."

"Wait what? Chief! She could still be alive! I saw her at my house a few weeks back and the bad men chased her away!"

That Mike kid noticed her. He knew she was out there too. *Crap*. He didn't even think before making them an empty promise.

"You know what? I'll look for her by myself later tonight and if I see her, I'll tell you kids first. Deal?"

"Take us with you. Then it's a deal."

He partially wanted to say yes, but he knew they couldn't, especially Will, his mom was paranoid about him being out. And who was he arguing with a 12-year-old?

"No."

Mike thought about it for a minute. Before he could come up with something, Will spoke up:

"She's out there, sir, and she might freeze to death in this weather."

"Which is why I've said I'd look for her *tonight*. Now go home, all of you. And get Will back to his mother, I'm surprised I haven't gotten a phone call from her calling where he is."

They remained unmoved.

"Now!"

A defeated Mike rounded up the gang and they all sulked out of his office. Hop felt bad for them. They *knew* she was alive, so he decided

to take a risk. He pulled Mike aside halfway out the door.

"If she's out there, I'll come get you and your friends."

"Thanks, but we're going to look for her tonight too."

Hopper knew he couldn't win this battle. He saw the kid walk away from him.

"Just be safe, and if you do find her, bring her to my trailer by the lake."

Mike's eyes lit up. he cracked a small smile, the chief still had hope too.

2. The Search Party

"Just be safe, stick together, and if anything, *anything* happens, come right back here. One hour!"

"Ok Mrs. Byers."

Joyce had become the very definition of a Helicopter Parent ever since Will went missing, so the boys weren't surprised when she said no to searching near Castle Byers for Eleven. It took a lot of convincing from Will to get her to agree to 1 hour of searching, and Joyce still thought it wasn't good for them to be searching for a girl who most likely died, but she knew she couldn't hold onto Will forever. She watched them as they went into the woods, only going back inside when she could no longer see them.

"The search party is **BACK!**"

Mike was ecstatic that they were all looking for Eleven again and happier that he had gotten the chief's approval.

"I know! It's just like First Blood when the cops are chasing Rambo, but we're the cops!"

Dustin always knew how to make the party smile. They walked towards Castle Byers as the snow crunched under their feet, laughing and talking just like old times. Once they got there they split up into 2 pairs, Dustin and Will as one and Lucas and Mike as the other. Will led the way and Dustin followed him, looking all around for Eleven. Mike and Lucas were planning to go the other way when they both heard a rustling of leaves.

"HEY!"

Mike yelled as loud as he could. The rustling stopped. All was quiet...

"You guys alright?"

The supercomm had crackled to life with the voice of Dustin. Before either of them could respond a figure lept from the leaves and tore

through the woods away from them. Mike silently bolted with all the energy he had in him towards the figure, while Lucas stayed back. He ran for what felt like forever almost catching up until he faceplanted himself into a tree. He knew noone would believe him if he told them it was Eleven, but he had a hunch that's who it was. He also knew he had 0 energy to keep running after it...her, but promised himself he'd follow the tracks alone later tonight.

"Mike went off after it, he'll probably be back soon."

Lucas wanted to believe it, but Eleven in the woods by herself? Dustin and Will stated they were going back because it'd been 1/2 an hour and they didn't want to freak Joyce out. Mike came back to Lucas a few minutes later, throwing a sentence together:

"It was probably a rabbit or something, let's just go back to Will's with the others."

And with that they both walked away, but silently in the shadows stood the figure, watching them.

She watched them for a few moments then ran as fast as she could away from them, before slowing down to a quick walk. She felt sad, happy, and angry. Sad because she knew she couldn't reveal herself to them, happy because this was the first time she'd seen them in a month, and angry at herself for forcing Mike into a tree. There was no way she could outrun him, but she never wanted to hurt him. She needed some more food from that *box*. She'd go there tonight.

It was time to go check his little trap he had laid out. He got out of his car and checked the box. Just the Tupperware. Someone had taken just the Eggos and he thought he knew who. He now knew she was near, but still hiding in the woods. He placed new Eggos in and was about to leave when he heard a noise behind him. It was Eleven. They stared at each other for a few seconds, then Hopper crouched down with his arms extended...praying that she would come to him. She took a few steps and fell into his arms, hugging onto him tight. Hop almost cried, feeling that same warmth he did when Sara would come and hug him. He let out a small sentence:

"It's OK. You're safe now. It's OK."

3. Tracking them Down

"Cold."

Eleven's first word to Hopper wasn't surprising, considering the only things keeping her warm were a stolen hat and jacket. He picked her up and sat her in the backseat of his truck.

"I'll get you someplace warm, kid."

"Mike."

Hopper suddenly realized he'd made a deal with those kids, with Mike. That he'd have tell them he had found Eleven. Or not. He shut the door and grabbed a blanket from the trunk. He gave it to her and she laid down on the seat.

"Thank.... You."

Amazing. She was cold, had nowhere to go, was practically mute, yet she still had the manners to fish for those 2 words.

It was a silent drive. He had no clue where she would be going. He couldn't bring her in town, the Lab workers might recognize her. He was also contemplating whether or not to tell Mike. Making up his mind about where to stay, he parked in front of his trailer, carried the sleeping kid inside and plopped her on the couch. He thought of cracking open a beer, but he didn't want the kid waking up and wanting a sip, so he decided on pulling up a chair and sleeping in it next to her.

Crunch. Crunch. Crunch.

The snow was the only thing keeping him company right now. Dustin and Lucas had to go back home, but Mike knew nobody would be waiting for him when he got home, so he hatched his plan. It was colder than earlier today, so he kept a quick pace. He began walking towards Castle Byers, then following the odd footsteps. They were converse shoes based on the length and width the mark left. He

followed them through the woods for a few dozen minutes before accidentally kicking a wooden box left in the snow. The trail had led here. He scanned the area and found big footprints. A man. Both tracks led to the road. There were tire treads going back on the road. Someone had taken whoever was at Will's into their car. He had to tell the chief.

She woke up screaming "No! Papa! No! Papa!" on repeat. Hopper lunged out of his chair towards the lamp, fumbling to turn it on. When he turned back he saw El grabbing at the wall, banging it with her fist. He grabbed her and hugged her tight until she had quieted down enough to talk. He was scared, it reminded him of Sara when she had woken up in the hospital yelling "I'm dying! Daddy help!" Those words shook him to his core and would stay with him forever. El spoke up:

"Papa."

"Yeah, what'd he do?"

"Shut door."

It seemed to Hopper she'd dreamed about Brenner locking her into a room.

"Nobody, not even Bre-.. Papa, is ever going to hurt you again... OK?"

"Promise?"

"I promise."

A few minutes passed before she started to doze in his arms. He laid her back on the couch and looked at the clock: 4:50. *Crap*. He had to figure out what to do with her before his shift started at 7:00 and he had to figure out what to say to Mike. "Uh, I found her, but you can't see her so yeah." No. He had to let the truth out, but how?

Mike was in Hopper's office at 7 on the dot. He had to let the truth out to Mike.

"Kid, I have some news."

"No, I have to tell you about where I think Eleven is."

Hopper knew she was in his trailer, but he let Mike proceed. He told him about the tire tracks, the box and the footprints in the snow. Hopper had to let the truth out. He now knew the only reason he hadn't found Eleven was because of him. He couldn't have said it more eloquently:

Author's Note: Now the story becomes AU

"That box was my trap, I have Eleven at my trailer as we speak."

4. Eleven Gets Drunk

"Maybe we can call you El, short for Eleven."

Eleven woke up to silence. The Policeman was gone. She wanted Mike. She sat up and scanned the room. 2 small dents in the wall, an unopened can of liquid, and a chair with a blanket on it. Thirsty, she opened the can and took a swig. It was disgusting, but she decided it was better than water and drank it anyway. She felt like she was on a high after the first can she didn't even realize that she had the other 2 in the fridge!

"..so in short: only you, your 3 friends, and I can know about her here, OK?"

"OK."

Hop parked his truck in front of his trailer. Mike jumped out at the speed of light towards the door. He knocked on the door fast and hard before Hopper pushed him aside and opened the door. The scene was not good. 3 empty beer cans on the floor and giggling coming from the kitchen. Mike tried taking in the whole place while Hopper went to locate Eleven. She was on top of the refrigerator with a drawer dropping silverware onto the floor.

"What are you doing?"

Eleven looked at him and smiled a big grin.

"Happy drink."

"No, not happy drink. Sad, depressing drink."

Hop said as he grabbed Eleven and set her onto the floor. She let out a large belch right as Mike walked in, seeing Eleven.

"El!"

"Mike!"

He went to hug her but she was a little tipsy and plopped into his hands before ruffling his hair and giggling some more.

"What's wrong with her?"

"She got into my beer while I was away! She's drunk."

Hopper tried to be angry but he couldn't help but smile.

"El, it's me, Mike. I'm here now, OK?"

Eleven left for the other room and reappeared with a can of beer.

"Mike, try. Happy drink."

Hopper slapped that beer out of her hand faster than he'd done anything before in his life. *Great, now I'm housing a fugitive and an alcoholic.*

"When will she be sober?"

"Well, she only drank 3 cans, so I'd say 6ish tonight."

"That's in 8 hours! Is there anything we can do to make her better now?"

Hopper sat her on the couch and told her to take deep breaths. In, and out. In, and out. It seemed to be working, as she stopped smiling and started to not look as crazy. He then handed her a glass of water which she drank a few gulps out of before dozing off almost instantly. Mike tried to wrap his head around what happened in the past 3 hours. He had seen Eleven for the first time in a month, saw her drunk, and watched as she dozed into a seemingly comfortable sleep.

"Can I bring the guys over today?"

"Later, after dinner. Say, 6:30?"

"Yeah. Great! Thank you. I'd better tell the guys she's safe and sound. Don't want them to freak out when they see her for the first time, yeah?"

Mike smiled at Eleven and grabbed her hand.

"I'll be back later, with Dustin and Lucas and Will, OK?"

And with that he flew out the door and grabbed his bike from the back of Hopper's truck, pedaling away to Dustin's house.

"Hey Mews."

Mike had to tell Dustin about Eleven, but not here.

"Dusty! Your friend is here to see you!"

"OK Mom!"

Dustin rounded the corner. The moment he saw his friend's face, he knew something had happened.

"Alright Mike, let's go. Bye Mom! Bye Mews! I'll be back later!"

Mike followed him and soon they were riding their bikes to Lucas's.

"So what's up?"

"Hopper found Eleven. We're going to see her at 6:30."

"Holy crap, Mike! Tell me the details."

"Turns out the thing I saw in the woods wasn't a rabbit. It was her. I followed the tracks and it all led up to Hopper."

They were passing Lucas's house as he was talking.

"Get your butt out here, Lucas!"

There wasn't anything Dustin wouldn't say. Turns out that was the magic word, because Lucas went flying out of his garage on his bike towards them.

"What's the deal, ladies?"

"Turns out Hopper has Eleven safe and sound and we're going there

at 6:30."

"Oh my goodness am I in!"

They biked to Mike's house and called Will, asking if he could stay over. Surprisingly, Joyce said yes. 7 hours later they were finishing up some Pitfall! On Mike's Atari and drinking loads of Coke, waiting for Karen to call them to dinner.

"Boys, Dinner!"

Karen hadn't seen them this jumpy to finish dinner quickly since they wanted to see Return of the Jedi a few months back. They all excused themselves within 5 minutes and were flying down the street on their bikes towards Hopper's place.

"Time?"

"6:27"

"We'll make it on time!"

They were knocking on his door the second it hit 6:30. They poured into his trailer with smiles up their faces searching for Eleven. Mike pulled Hopper aside.

"Is she better?"

"A little out of it, she threw up a few hours ago and I lectured her for 45 minutes on why she can't drink beer."

"Where is she?"

"In here somewhere. She's been exploring."

Will yelled out an "Eleven!" and within half a second she poked her head out of Hopper's bedroom.

"Friends."

5. Five Normal Kids

"El! We missed you so much!"

Lucas and Dustin went right at her. Will, however, stayed behind. He didn't know her except what Mike had said about her, that she had killed people.

"Uh, hi Eleven. My name's Will. Thanks for... uh.. saving my life."

"Will... Byers?"

"Yep, that's me."

"Will."

"...Yup..."

Eleven stuck out her hand.

"Greetings."

Hopper nearly died laughing. He'd explained how to greet someone earlier. Stick out your hand and say "Hello". Seemed she'd forgotten the "Hello" part. It needed work. Will held out his hand and they shook hands.

"Well *that* was awkward."

There went Dustin again making everyone laugh out loud.

They'd caught up with all that happened in the past few weeks and were sprawled out on Hop's floor chatting and watching TV together. El fit in perfectly as the 5th member of their party. Hopper smiled, looking at them all there. Laughing, having fun, spilling the bag of chips Dustin had brought all over the carpet. Hopper thought *I'm never having kids again. Wait. I do have one.* He had to figure out what to do with her. She needed safety from the Lab, education, a place to sleep that wasn't the sofa, and a way to just be a normal kid. She'd been wearing the same outfit for a month for crying out loud! Safety

was #1, so he'd be setting up some ground rules. For the living situation he'd have to sacrifice and sleep on the sofa himself. So far so good. Education. He knew there was no way she could survive a real school, so she'd need a tutor. Someone OK with teaching a fugitive.

"Hey guys?"

5 heads turned around.

"Is there a teacher that could tutor Eleven that's completely OK working with a fugitive?"

4 heads all said in unison:

"Mr. Clark!"

And that's how he ended up here, at Hawkins Middle. He hadn't been here since Will had gone missing. *AV room. AV room. Here it is.* Opening the door, he saw the 4 boys and Mr. Clark messing with a radio.

"Can I talk to you for a second?"

"Yeah, Hop, what's up?"

"Alone." pointing to the 4 boys.

"Can I trust you to secretly tutor a kid, I'll pay you well. She's the boys' friend. I'm going to be looking after her for the next few months, possibly longer, and she's not up to an 8th grade level. I need to trust you to do this in secret. Can you?"

"Absolutely! I'm always encouraging the boys to learn and not taking this opportunity would severely undermine my influence in their lives."

Hopper huffed an "*Oh boy.*"

"So you'll do it? Say 2 hours every Saturday starting Christmas Eve?"

"Yup. I guess I'll see her then."

They shook hands and parted ways. Hopper got back into his truck and tapped 3 times the steering wheel. *Pat. Pat. Pat.* Eleven sprung up from hiding.

"Will I learn?"

"Yup. A guy named Mr. Clark is going to be visiting every Saturday to help you learn."

"Where are friends?"

"They'll be out later. Let's get you some new clothes, that dress looks filthy."

"Filthy?"

"Like not clean. Mud. Stains. Stuff like that."

"Stains?"

Saturday could not come soon enough.

"This looks good."

Hopper held out a pair of overalls towards Eleven. Thrift stores were always deserted, so he thought it was OK to take Eleven inside, as long as she stuck close. She desperately needed new clothes, anyway.

"Yes."

"How about this?"

"Yes."

"You're only interested in that gumball machine, aren't you?"

Hopper knew she was really bored and wasn't listening to him. Maybe it would be OK to let her pick something out. She needed some level of freedom, right?

"How about you go over to the toy section and pick out a nice stuffed animal."

"For me?"

"Yeah."

And she was off. Running through the lines of clothes in a mud-caked dress and checkered hat that concealed her still short hair. Which one would it be? The Whale? Or the Rhino? Or maybe the mighty Elephant. Hopper glanced over to see her smiling, which made him smile too. He loved seeing her happy. She ran back over and plopped her choice into the basket.

"A rhino!"

"Yeah, kid. What are you going to name it?"

"Rhino."

Hopper saw another toy he knew she'd love, but she would have to wait until Christmas to open it. He plopped that into the basket and threw some new bedding on top of it. He then spotted something he'd have to return alone for.

"That'll be 16.76."

The zit-faced cashier didn't seem to mind at all that there was a girl caked in mud in front of him. Before long they were flying down the road back to Hopper's trailer. Mike and the gang would want to come over today, so he'd have to get her changed and clean up the spilled chips from yesterday.

"Change into these, and take a shower in there, OK?"

"Shower?"

"You know, get clean?" Throwing her a soap.

"Just turn the handle and you'll figure the rest out."

Hopper watched her enter the bathroom and he waited to hear the water go on before cleaning up Dustin's mess. *Man, this kid eats a lot of chips.* A few minutes later and Eleven was sitting, reading a book

in a clean room. The doorbell rang.

"Chief? It's me, Steve!"

6. Steve the Babysitter

Eleven glanced towards the banging door. Hopper walked past her and cracked it open.

"What do you want, Steve?"

"Nancy saw your car parked at the Middle School and sent me over to check if Mike was OK, she said he's been acting weird the past few days."

"Yeah, I mean, I don't know. I wasn't there for *him*."

"Well who were you there for?"

Eleven stood up slowly and cautiously walked towards Hopper.

"It's none of your concern."

"Oh, uh... yeah. OK. Thanks, chief. I'll tell her it wasn't him."

Hopper shut the door in his face. He barely turned back to Eleven when the door swung open.

"Can I use your bathroom real quick?"

The cat was out of the bag. He'd seen Eleven. They all stared at each other for a couple seconds.

"Is that that girl the Lab was after a few weeks ago. What's her name, like Eleven or something? Don't worry, I won't tell anyone."

Hopper mentally breathed a sigh of relief. This kid could be a cop someday. Questioning someone persistently, opening doors unannounced, keeping secrets when they needed to be kept.

"Yeah, uh... found her a few days back."

"Oh great. I thought she died. Can I use your bathroom?"

"Uh, sure."

And with that Steve walked into the bathroom without another look. Eleven looked worryingly at Hopper.

"He's safe, El."

The phone rang. A hunter had come into the station with a broken arm, saying some girl had knocked him out and stolen his jacket and that he'd been treated for hypothermia for a week.

"Hey, Steve?"

"Yeah, chief?"

"Stay here with Eleven. I have some business to take care of."

"Wait! I have a date with Nancy tonight at the Hawk!"

Hopper didn't hear him, he was already out the door. *Great. Now I'm stuck babysitting.* Steve exited the bathroom and sat in the chair next to Eleven.

"So... Eleven? Is that your name?"

"Yes."

"OK, my name's Steve. Steve Harrington."

"You suck face with Nancy?"

"Where'd you hear that?"

"Dustin."

"Don't say that."

"It just doesn't make sense, George."

Hopper needed to defuse this guy before he contacted the Lab or someone connected.

"You calling me a liar?"

"No, but you're telling me this girl with a buzzcut apparently threw a cooked squirrel at you with her mind and knocked you out? It just doesn't sound realistic."

"Well what do you think it was?"

"I think you should just take it easy, I'll buy you a new coat too if that helps."

"Well... OK. But I saw what I saw."

"OK."

Hopper was getting tired of this routine. Lying to everyone about her existence, but he had to if it meant keeping her safe.

Steve checked his watch: 6:43. How had he been here an hour now! He told Nancy he'd pick her up at 7:00! Plopping a red checker into the board, he tried to leave.

"I had no idea how much fun Connect Four was until today, Eleven, but I really have to go get Nancy."

"Movie?"

"Yeah, so... uh... when is Mike going to get here."

"Six-Three-Zero."

"Looks like Prince Charming's a little late."

"Prince?"

The door swung open unexpectedly for the second time today.

"Sorry I'm late El, nobody else could make it tonight."

"Karen knows you're here?"

Mike shot his eyes over to the kitchen table. Steve.

"Uh, no, I uh... lied."

"Tsk tsk Mike. I thought you knew better than to lie to your own parent."

"Excuse me, but who invited you here?"

"It's a long story and I've gotta run." Steve said while getting up.

"Where?"

"El, tell em!"

"To suck face with Nancy!"

"Thatta girl!" Steve yelled as he ruffled her short hair.

"Bye Steve!"

"Bye kiddos," Steve said as he opened the door and went out to his car. "and one other thing: no funny business you two."

"You're not my mom!" Mike yelled out the trailer.

"You don't know that!" Steve yelled as he drove away.

Mike and Eleven talked about their days for the few minutes before Hopper got back.

"Mr. Clark will teach me."

"Wow, El! I'm a bit jealous."

"Jealous?"

"It's like when you want something that someone else has."

"Mike?"

"Yeah?"

"Can I be jealous for you?"

"Um, well... that's using the word out of context and..."

He felt himself trailing off. He stared deeply into Eleven's eyes.

"Mike?"

"Uh huh?"

"I like you."

She held his hand and they felt themselves getting closer to each other, leaning into a-

"What are you doing?"

They both jumped miles apart from each other.

"Nothing." they both said in unison.

"Yeah, sure. Mike, go home."

Hopper was the sternest he'd ever been in this moment.

"But I just got here!"

"Now."

Mike got the message.

"Uh... bye El. See you tomorrow."

He slammed the door behind him and pedaled away.

"Where is Steve?"

"Movie."

"Why was just Mike here?"

"I don't know."

Hopper sighed, he'd have to set up some ground rules next.

7. A Little Runaway

Mouthbreather Hopper. He thinks he can control me? No happy drink, no Mike? I'll show him. Eleven opened the window of her bedroom and ran out, into the night.

"El?"

Hopper knocked on her door.

"I'm sorry for last night. Being a little mean to Mike and you. It's just, I don't want anything to happen. OK, kid?"

There was silence on the other side of the door.

"Kid?"

Hopper opened the door to an empty room with an open window. All he could think about was someone taking her. He ran around to the outside of the window. One set of tracks. She'd just run away herself. Hopper grabbed his and Eleven's jackets and followed the tracks in the snow.

The Supercomm crackled to life beside Mike.

"Hey Mike, now that Eleven's back are you still coming to the Snowball tomorrow night?"

"I don't know. Hopper seemed pretty pissed that I was there with just Eleven last night."

"You promised her, Mike.!"

"Shut up, Dustin!"

He retracted his antenna and got out of bed. *Ahhh. First day of winter break. Nothing's on the agenda today.* He quickly got dressed and flew down into the basement. He started cleaning up from the D&D game a few days back and glanced over to the Blanket fort out of habit. In

it was Eleven.

"Eleven? Why are you here?"

"Mad at Hopper."

"Yeah, and he'll be pissed off even more if he finds out you're missing!"

Eleven knew she was in trouble now.

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be sorry to me, I'd be sorry to Hopper."

"What do I do now?"

"I guess go back to Hop's trailer."

"OK. Goodbye Mike."

"How about just 'see ya'?"

"See ya."

Eleven opened the basement door and started following her tracks in the snow back to the trailer. Mike didn't want her going back alone so he grabbed a coat and caught up to her.

"Hey, remember that promise I made about going to the Snowball?"

"Yes."

"Do you want to come with me to it tomorrow night?"

"OK."

"Really? Great, cool."

"Cool."

They could see Hopper following her same tracks in the distance. Eleven halted, but Mike grabbed her hand and walked towards him.

"Geez, Eleven. I was worried sick! You could've been caught or worse."

"See ya, Mike."

"Thanks for bringing her back, but I'll talk to you later."

Hopper grabbed hold of Eleven's arm, practically dragging her, and led her back to the trailer.

"Let me go!"

"No. You ran away and when we get back, I'm going to write up some rules while you think about what you did."

They got inside and he threw Eleven in her room before shutting the door. He then started drawing up some rules for Eleven to follow.

Mike went back to his house and jumped on his Supercomm.

"Lucas, do you copy?"

"Yeah, what is it Mike?"

"I think I'm not going to the Snowball tomorrow."

"What? Will already asked Jennifer Hayes and they're going! What happened to you and Eleven?"

"She ran away from Hopper last night and I'm pretty sure I can't visit her anymore."

"Grap."

"I know, right?"

"Wait, can anyone else visit her?"

"I doubt it."

"I gotta go, Mike, good luck."

Hopper half-smiled at his rules. He knew he had to tell Eleven them.

"Eleven!"

"Go away."

"Get out here now!"

"No."

"Do you want me to take Eggos away?"

A puffy-eyed Eleven sulked out of her room. Hopper could tell she'd been crying.

"Have a seat."

She sat down.

"Rule #1: No leaving the trailer without me.

Rule #2: Friends are only allowed over if me, Steve, or Mr. Clark are present.

And you can't see Mike for 2 days because of what you pulled today. Understand?"

"No. I'm going to Snowball with him."

"No, you're not."

"You can't do this to me!"

"Yes I can. You're not going to that dance. You could get caught."

"I'll go as Eleanor."

"No, you won't. End of discussion. Now give me your dirty clothes so I can wash them."

She got up and ran back to her room, throwing her laundry in his face before slamming the door.

I'm going to the Snowball one way or another.

Author's Note: Did you like this chapter? Any changes you'd like made? Let me know in a review!

8. Going Against Orders

"Steve, I'm gonna need you to stay here with Eleven today I have a long shift today. She ran away yesterday and I'm going to have to have someone watching her when I'm gone."

"Sure, chief, I'm on my way."

Hopper hung up the phone. It was difficult to pinpoint where his anger was coming from. He'd done some pretty stupid things as a kid himself, so he shouldn't really be surprised that Eleven would do stupid things too. He put his hat on and waited for Steve to pull up before leaving.

"Mike..."

Nobody picked up.

"Mike..."

"What?"

"Are you coming to the Snowball tonight?"

"No. Over and out."

His usually fun winter break had started in turmoil. He couldn't see Eleven, so he'd just have to wait the punishment out. Or did he?

"Wait, Dustin!"

"What, Mike?"

"Hopper's at work today, so we could sneak over to see Eleven."

"We?"

"Yeah."

"No, Mike. I'm not getting in trouble. I have too much riding on this

date with Stacy. Maybe after the Snowball."

"She didn't even say yes to going with you!"

"Well I'm playing hard to get."

"Yeah, because she already notices you."

"Shut up you wasteoid!"

"Fine! I guess I'll just go see El myself then!"

"Your funeral."

"See you later."

"Preferably at the Snowball, Mike."

He downed his breakfast before leaving to go see Eleven, but he had something in his backpack: the blonde wig Eleven wore as a disguise.

Do it. Do it. Do it.

"Stacy, it's Dustin. Will you go with me to the Snowball?"

"Uh, who is this?"

"Dustin Henderson."

"I've never seen you before, so no. Goodbye."

Dustin sat back down, defeated. He was officially crushed.

"Mike?"

The Supercomm spoke loudly in Mike's backpack.

"What?"

"I'm coming to see Eleven with you. Over and out."

Steve loved having a little buddy to hang out with, but today that buddy wasn't talking to him.

"Eleven! I made food!"

She didn't respond.

"I made Eggos!"

She opened her door slowly and walked out to the table.

"Is there a reason you're mad today? Did Hopper take something away from you?"

"Mike." Eleven whispered, chewing on an Eggo.

"He banned Mike from visiting you?"

Steve and Eleven sat in silence for a little while before Eleven continued,

"For 2 days, but the Snowball is today!"

Steve could feel the sadness radiating off of her. He remembered when he first went to that dance. It was one of the best nights of his Middle School years. He couldn't imagine what it felt like for her to be banned from seeing her best friend, that would be like being banned from seeing Nancy.

"How about you go to that dance tonight, with Mike. Hopper doesn't need to know a thing. And if he finds out, I'll take all of the blame."

"Really?"

"We just need to figure out what to do with your hair."

Mike and Dustin trekked through the snow. Lucas and Will were probably getting ready for their dates, but these 2 were hatching a plan.

"So I have Eleven's wig here, and she still has that dress we gave her."

"What are we going to call her?"

"Eleanor."

They reached Hop's trailer and went inside.

"Mike!"

"Hey Eleven."

"No. Ground rules. You can't be here."

"I'm here *secretly* so there are no ground rules."

It was a slow day at the station, that is, until George Burness came back and started complaining about his medical bills he had to pay.

"Chief! You have to send a search party out to look for this kid."

"No, George. I've already offered to pay for your coat. There's nothing else we can do."

"I'm not taking no for an answer!"

"Powell, can you escort him out please?"

"You're making a mistake, Hop!"

Eleven walked out to the 3 others in her pink dress and blue coat.

"What do you think?"

"I think you need more hair."

Dustin reached into Mike's bag and gave the wig to Eleven. She put it on and Mike blushed a little.

The 2 boys sped home to get changed for the dance. Steve would drive Eleven there later. For now, he'd tell her what to say to strangers.

"So what's your name?"

"Eleanor."

"Where do you live?"

"That's none of your business."

"Perfect. I think you're ready."

They both got in Steve's car and drove to the school. On the way, he ran through the basics.

"So you're Mike's cousin to everybody, OK."

"OK."

"So no kissing him or anything."

"Why no?"

"Because it's weird if you do OK?"

"OK."

"There's Mike by the door. Alright kiddo, see you in 2 hours. Did you set your watch?"

"Yes."

"See you then, no later."

This was it. Mike's promise would be fulfilled. She walked towards her friends. Another girl was there

"Hi Eleanor, I'm Jennifer Hayes. I'm here with Will."

"Hello. I'm here with Mike."

Lucas and now Dustin didn't have anyone, so they mainly were there for the food at this point. The 6 of them walked inside to the check in counter. Mr. Clark was manning it.

"Eleanor?"

9. The Snowball

"And what brings you back to Hawkins?"

Before Eleven could say anything, Mike and Lucas jumped in.

"Y'know, Christmas and stuff."

"And seeing Will."

"Yeah, that too." Dustin said.

"And she's going to be staying with Hopper."

"She's his daughter."

Mr. Clark was confused now. He knew the chief had a daughter, but someone told him she'd died. Then why were the boys making her out to be Mike's cousin?

"Isn't she your cousin, Mike?"

"Uh, I lied. Sorry. Her name is actually Eleanor though."

"Oh, well, OK."

They all went into the Gymnasium. There were several dozen kids here, but there would be more as the night went on. There was also a banner hanging from the ceiling: Snow Ball 1983.

"Eleven? Steve? I'm home."

Hopper opened the door to the empty trailer. Steve and Eleven were nowhere in sight.

"El?"

He cracked open her bedroom door. Empty as well. *Not again.* He almost certainly knew where she was right now. He got back into his truck and sped off towards the Middle School.

"Here, try this punch."

Jennifer handed a cup of punch to Will.

"Uh, thanks. For the punch I mean. So I hear you went to my funeral?"

"We all thought you'd died. Turns out you were just lost in the woods, right?"

"You could say that. I heard from Dustin you cried at my funeral?"

She punched him playfully before they made their way to the table. Dustin and Lucas had two huge plates of food.

"Did you try the pudding, El?"

"No."

"You should."

The dance had filled up with dozens of other kids coming inside. Before long the music started playing. Will and Jennifer got up to go dance. Dustin and Lucas were almost in a food coma by now, and Mike turned over to Eleven.

"Hey, do you want to dance?"

"Dance."

She'd heard that word before on TV.

"Yeah, wanna?"

"Yes."

They got up and walked over to Will and Jennifer.

Hopper got to the Middle School where he found a waiting Steve by the door. He walked up to Hopper.

"Chief. I can explain."

"Yes, please do."

"Just look in there, sir. What do you see?"

Hopper looked inside to see a bunch of kids dancing, including Eleven, who was smiling ear to ear.

"See her, Hop? I'm not saying what she did running away was right, but keeping her from her friends that make her smile is only going to make her mad."

Hopper could feel his stone-cold heart turn to mush.

"When'd you become a full-time parent, kid?"

They would wait together outside the school until the 2 hours were up.

"Dancing is fun."

"Yeah."

A slower song came on and Miked looked over to other kids kissing. He and Eleven looked at each other.

"No, Mike. Steve said no kissing. Later."

"Fine."

The dance wound down and other kids were going home. Dustin and Lucas were snoring in their chairs and Will was saying goodbye to Jennifer.

"Dustin, wake up!"

"Lucas!"

They both woke up startled.

"We're leaving."

They were all leaving and Eleven was looking for Steve when she saw the giant of a man who forbid her to go.

"Eleven. I'm sorry for banning you from seeing your friends. Seems it might take a while to get back into dad-mode."

The sentence took her by surprise.

"I'm sorry too."

Karen was pulling up to pick up Mike, so Hopper and Eleven had to leave or otherwise be seen.

"Bye El."

"Yeah, bye."

"See you later."

"See you."

Hopper rolled his eyes at how close these kids' bonds were with each other.

They were driving back to his trailer when she brought up the question.

"Why do you wear that?"

"What?"

"That blue bracelet."

"It was my daughter's. It was Sara's."

"Sara?"

"Yeah, she uh, died a few years back."

"Was she pretty?"

"Yeah, really pretty."

She sat back into the chair. He must have cared about his daughter a lot. He took the bracelet off and gave it to her.

"Here. You can have it now."

"For me? It was your daughter's."

"I know."

She slid it on and held his hand on the way back to the trailer. Hopper smiled a lot more after that night.

It was Christmas Eve, 1983. It was the big day. Eleven was awaiting Mr. Clark to show up.

"Do you have your wig on?"

"Yes. When will he come?"

"He's going to be here soon, OK?"

"When is soon?"

There was a knock at the door followed by an open.

"Hello Eleanor, Mr. Clark."